

לב

Meaning:

- The heart
- Used figuratively for the feelings, the will and even the intellect
- The centre of anything

Noun, masculine (although conceptually neutral, being used for both men and women). Occurs nearly 600 times in the Old Testament.

Range of Meaning in the Bible

Occasionally used for the physical organ of the heart, for example “Nabal’s heart died within him” ([1 Samuel 25:37](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 25:37

Hebrew וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר בַּצָּאֵת הַלַּיִל מִנְבֵּל וַתִּגַּד לוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיָּמָת לִבּוֹ בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְהוּא הָיָה לְאֶבֶן ESV In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. NIV Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone.

καὶ πρῶτος ἐξένηψεν ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴνου ἀπήγγειλ...).

Often used to describe the inner Person or mind, the seat of thought, reflection, and understanding. Hebrew anthropology sees thinking as occurring in the heart (rather than the brain). For example, “The LORD saw that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” ([Genesis 6:5](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 6:5

Hebrew וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל יִצְרָ מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ רָק רָע כָּל הַיּוֹם ESV The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. NIV The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

ἰδὼν δὲ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐπληθύνθησαν αἱ κακαὶ αἰτῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς...).

The word also describes a person's will or intention, that is, the centre of a person's decisions and moral choices. For example, “Pharaoh hardened his heart” ([Exodus 8:15](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigExodus 8:5

Hebrew וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפָרְעֹה הַתְּפָאֵר עָלַי לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעֲמָךְ לְהַכְרִית הַצִּפְרָדִּיעִים מִמֶּךָּ וּמִבְתְּיֶיךָ רָק בִּי אֶרָנָה ESV And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” NIV δὲ κύριος πρὸς τῷ Ἀδελφῷ σου ἔκτεινον τῇ χειρὶ τὴν ῥάβδον σου ἐπὶ τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς καὶ ἀνάγαγε τοὺς βατ...), meaning he made a deliberate choice.

The לב is also the source of feelings—joy, fear, courage, or sorrow. For example, “Take heart, all you who hope in the LORD” ([Psalm 31:24](#)).

And sometimes the word refers to one's sense of right and wrong, for example, “David’s heart struck

him” (1 Samuel 24:5plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 24:5

Hebrew וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנֹשִׁי דָּוִד אֵלָיו הֲלֵה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלָיִךְ הֲלֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן אֶת אִיבֶיךָ אֵיבֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר Hebrew
ESV And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. NIV Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἐπάταξεν καρ...), or in other words, his conscience troubled him.

Theological Significance

The לב represents the core of human identity—thought, feeling, and will united.

God judges the לב: “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 16:7

Hebrew וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל שָׁמוּאֵל אַל תִּבְט אֶל מְרֹאֵהוּ וְאֶל גְּבוֹה קוֹמָתוֹ כִּי מֵאַסְתִּיהוּ כִּי לֹא אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה הָאָדָם כִּי הָאָדָם Hebrew
ESV But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. καὶ κύριος πρὸς μὴ ἐπιβλέψῃς ἐπὶ τὴν ὄψιν αὐτοῦ...).

The לב can be deceitful or pure, hard or soft, circumcised or uncircumcised (a metaphor for spiritual condition) (Jeremiah 17:9plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigJeremiah 17:9

Hebrew וְיָדַעְנוּ מִי יָדַעְנוּ Hebrew
ESV The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? NIV The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? NLT “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιά ἀπαρὰ πάντα καὶ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν καὶ τίς αὐτόν... and Deuteronomy 10:16plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 10:16

Hebrew וְיָדַעְנוּ מִי יָדַעְנוּ Hebrew
ESV Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. NIV Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. NLT Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn. καὶ περιτεμεῖσθε τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν καὶ τὸν τράχηλον ὑμῶν οὐ σκληρυνεῖτε ἔτι...).

The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 6:5

Hebrew וְאַהֲבָתָךְ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ Hebrew
ESV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. NIV Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου...) commands love for God “with all your heart” - this means with your entire inner being, your mind, will, and emotion.

Forms

Singular

Number	Gender	Meaning / Use	Example	Hebrew Form
Singular	Masculine	“heart” (common form)	Deuteronomy 6:5 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 6:5 Hebrew וְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ יְרַחֵם וְיַבְרֵךְ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ וְיִשְׁכַּח כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ וְכָל מִצְוֹתָיו יַעֲשֶׂה עִמָּךְ ESV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. NIV Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου...	לב
Singular (variant)	Masculine	Poetic or emphatic form of “heart”	Psalms 9:1 (NIV) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigI will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. (verse 2 in the Hebrew Bible) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigתְּהַלֵּל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִשְׁבַּח וְיִשְׁמַח וְיִשְׁכַּח כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְכָל מִצְוֹתָיו יַעֲשֶׂה עִמָּנוּ	לבב

Plural

Number	Gender	Meaning / Use	Notes	Hebrew Form
Plural	Feminine	"hearts" (common plural of לֵב)	Most frequent plural form	לְבָבוֹת
Plural (alternative)	Feminine	"hearts"	Rare poetic form	לְבוֹת
Plural (alternative)	Masculine	"hearts"	Rare, mostly poetic or late usage	לְבָבִים

Examples of commonly encountered uses

Meaning	Example Verse	Hebrew Form
My heart (first person singular)	Psalm 13:5	לִבִּי
Your heart (masculine, singular)	Deuteronomy 6:5 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 6:5 Hebrew וְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ ESV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. NIV Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου...	לִבְךָ
His heart	Genesis 6:5 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 6:5 Hebrew וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל יֹצֵר מַחֲשַׁבֶּת לִבּוֹ רָק רָע כָּל הַיּוֹם ESV The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. NIV The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ἰδὼν δὲ κύριος ὅτι ἐδόξασεν πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς...	לבו
Her heart	1 Samuel 1:13 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 1:13 Hebrew וְחַנָּה הָיְתָה מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל לִבָּהּ רַק שְׁפָתֶיהָ נִזְעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָה עָלֶיּ לִשְׁכָרָה ESV Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. NIV Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk καὶ αὐτὴ ἐλάλει ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτῆς ἐκινεῖτο καὶ φωνὴ αὐτῆς οὐκ ἀκούετο καὶ ἐλογίσατο αὐτὴ νεῖς μ...	לִבָּהּ
Their heart	Psalm 95:10	/ לִבָּם לִבָּבָם
With all your heart	Deuteronomy 6:5 plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 6:5 Hebrew וְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ ESV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. NIV Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου...	בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ

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